The National Urban Policy Programme: Implementing the New Urban Agenda

UN-Habitat, OECD, Cities Alliance
1. Background

Addressing the challenges of urbanization in a sustainable and equitable manner requires a crosssectoral approach to urban policies and an increased level of vertical and horizontal coordination. Collaborative efforts among all levels of government, civil society, the private sector and other relevant stakeholders is critical to make this happen, through the development of National Urban Policies (NUP).

NUP is an instrument for guiding sustainable urban development in a country. By engaging both top down and bottom up policy processes, a NUP can help to create an enabling, collaborative and cooperative institutional environment, assist with the mobilization of stakeholders, assess and build capacities (institutional, financial, human, etc), and importantly, define an urban vision and plan for a country with jointly defined and transparent responsibilities.

Moreover, a NUP has been recognized internationally as a tool for the implementation and monitoring of global urban agendas, such as the Sustainable Development Goals, Paris Agreement and Sendai Framework. Its selection as one of ten thematic Policy Units, in preparation for the Third United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development (Habitat III), is demonstrative of the recognition on the international stage of the relevance of NUP. The New Urban Agenda highlights the essential role of National Urban Policy for building an enabling governance framework, “We will take measures to establish legal and policy frameworks, based on the principles of equality and non-discrimination, to enhance governments’ ability to effectively implement national urban policies, as appropriate, and to empower them as policymakers and decision makers, ensuring appropriate fiscal, political and administrative decentralization based on the principle of subsidiarity” (New Urban Agenda, 2016: 13)

In many countries there is often a lack of the supporting national and subnational policies and frameworks that can leverage the urbanization process for increased development gains and guide it towards sustainable patterns. Governments and other stakeholders may have inadequate capacity and the specialized skill to be able successfully to undertake this process independent of outside guidance. Additionally, governments often lack the data, knowledge, and tools needed to develop complex policies and plans like a NUP.

2. Objectives of the Programme

The National Urban Policy Programme (NUPP) will aim to bridge these gaps observed in many countries in developing NUPs. The Programme will endeavor to solve the problem of lack of data, knowledge, and tools by building a foundation of urban knowledge through the provision of a forum for knowledge creation, knowledge exchange and knowledge management. The Programme will work to bridge the capacity gap by working with national and local governments as well as relevant stakeholders in order to allow them to build the specialized skills required to develop NUP. In addition, the Programme will increase governance coordination through the provision of technical assistance and advisory services on the design, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of NUP and its associated processes. The NUPP will also provide a platform for all levels of government and relevant stakeholders to network and engage amongst themselves regarding the processes of developing and implementing NUP. This platform will also facilitate the broader engagement of stakeholders, outside of participating members of the NUPP in order to show how NUP can be used to communicate to stakeholders about important urban issues in their communities and which can be used to facilitate the enabling institutional conditions for all stakeholders, such as local government, to engage in the policy process.

The NUPP has the following objectives:

- To enhance knowledge creation and knowledge management on NUP at all levels of government, civil society, the private sector and other relevant stakeholders and to help facilitate the transfer of knowledge among them. The Programme will encourage countries’ and cities’ peer to peer learning and exchange of good practice through policy transfer and learning, while addressing the specificity of local context. Through these knowledge-based activities, the Programme aims to support evidence-based NUP making processes.

- To help increase the capacity (human, financial, and institutional) of policy makers at the national and sub-national level to develop and implement urban policy, particularly in the form of NUP, by providing a platform for capacity development activities.
• To provide direct country support for NUP making processes, in order to ensure involvement of all the key stakeholders (relevant ministries, subnational governments, etc.) and participatory processes.

• To monitor the progress of NUP in its role as a part of the monitoring process of the New Urban Agenda / Sustainable Development Goals, through a global review and country specific reviews on NUP.

• To provide a platform for all levels of government, civil society, the private sector and other relevant stakeholders to network among themselves and engage in the process of developing and implementing NUP. The platform can engage in advocacy activities with a broad base of stakeholders in order to communicate the importance of NUP and the ability of NUP to act as a communication mechanism to initiate dialogue on urbanization in general.

The NUPP will build on the recommendations in the Policy Paper on NUP, developed by the work of the expert group of Policy Unit 3 during the Habitat III preparation process. In this way the Programme will work to support the implementation and monitoring of global agendas for sustainable urbanization.

3. Proposed contents of the Programme

In order to meet the objectives, below are the examples of activities which the NUPP can offer. More activities can be added, as more partners participate to support the Programme, and based on demands from participating governments and relevant stakeholders:

a) Knowledge creation and knowledge management

Creating and managing knowledge on NUP are essential parts of the National Urban Policy Programme in order to ensure that urban policy and planning are evidence based. The Programme will directly support national governments by collecting data, best practices, and other knowledge on NUP across the world and by sharing them through peer learning and exchange activities.

b) Online Resource Portal

The NUP Online Resource Portal will function as a knowledge hub and provide an online forum for NUP related resources and tools for partners and stakeholders. The online platform will allow for an increased centralization of knowledge and tools on NUP. The online portal will consist of a variety of materials on NUP including:

- Online NUP Toolkits
- Online Interactive NUP Map
- Online NUP Database (link to NUPs in different countries, including the policy document, the leading ministry, etc. International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning, spatial frameworks, urban rural linkages, as well as information drawn from International Conferences on NUP, etc.)
- Various resources on NUP and related tools such as dialogues and videos

The NUP Online Resource Portal will also allow an online forum for discussion and exchange regarding NUP among national governments and other key stakeholders.

• Expert Group Meetings (EGMs)

Building on the two EGMs of Policy Unit 3 on NUP (co-organized by OECD and UN Habitat, Paris and Incheon in November and December of 2015, respectively) and the preceding EGM on NUP (organized by UN-Habitat – the meeting took place in Madrid, 2014), the NUPP will operate a network of researchers on NUP. It is important to maintain such network of experts in order to provide professional assessment and recommendations to the implementation of NUPs and the New Urban Agenda.

• Developing datasets and indicators on urban and metropolitan areas

The NUPP can develop internationally comparative datasets and indicators at urban areas beyond (historically defined) administrative borders, by applying the concept of Functional Urban Areas (defined as urban cores and integrated commuting zones). Such datasets and indicators can better inform policymakers and support evidence-based policy making at the right scale. For example, in 2015-16, the OECD has analyzed Columbia and identified their Functional Urban Areas.
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• Policy relevant research related to NUPs

The NUPP will also undertake a wide range of research activities with regard to NUP, in order to support central and local governments.

b) A platform for capacity development activities

Integrating the development of capacity at all levels of government is necessary for sustainable urban policy and planning. Through both the assessment and development of human, financial, and institutional capacity, it is possible to ensure that a NUP can be successfully developed, implemented, and monitored and evaluated by all levels of government.

A lack of skills and capacity in national and subnational governments has been highlighted as one of the key challenges to developing and successfully implementing a NUP, and therefore also to achieving more coordinated governance between national and sub-national levels. This portion of the Programme will aim to address this challenge by offering capacity development, by which government officials (and other relevant stakeholders) can work to improve their skills to develop, implement, and monitor and evaluate NUPs. The Programme will also encourage peer to peer learning, particularly through study visits to learn other country’s contexts.

It is recognized that the development of a NUP and capacity development for NUPs is a long and complex process. Capacity development approaches in the NUPP will offer both pre and post engagement in order to encourage a long term commitment to capacity development within the NUP process. This way the NUPP can support capacity development needs throughout the duration of the NUP development, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation as well as encouraging the institutionalization of capacity development mechanisms.

• Capacity development sessions and seminars

Capacity development sessions and seminars can be held for national and subnational policy makers and practitioners to learn key principles on NUPs, good practices from other countries, etc. For example, key materials can include:

- International Guidelines on Urban and Territorial Planning (UN-Habitat),

- Building Successful Cities: A National Urban Policy Framework (OECD)

- Toolkit for the OECD Principles on Effective Public Investment Across Levels of Government (OECD)

- The National Urban Policy Guiding Framework (UN Habitat)

• Thematic platforms

The NUPP can provide thematic platforms providing supporting tools for policy implementation related to NUP. For example, Cities Alliance is currently developing through their members 2 platforms: A resilience platform (by UN-Habitat) and a platform on City Development Strategies (by IHS).

• Study visits and peer-to-peer learning exchange (UN-Habitat)

The NUPP can organize study visits to learn from policy makers and other stakeholders about the experience of urbanization and with urban policy in other country contexts. Peer-to-peer learning exchange was facilitated during the two-day Field Tour at the First International Conference on National Urban Policy held in Incheon, Korea in December, 2015. The tour was hosted by the Korea Land and Housing Corporation and shared Korean urbanization experiences with representatives from more than 17 countries.

c) Country support to increase urban governance through NUP

Engagement at country level will facilitate the development of NUPs reflecting the specificity of local context. The development of a NUP will work to enhance the urban governance coordination across levels of government, civil society, the private sectors and other relevant stakeholders within the participating countries. Enhanced governance coordination will ensure the development of more sustainable and more inclusive urban policy and urban planning practices in those countries.

• National Urban Policy Reviews/diagnostics (OECD, UN-Habitat)

The Programme can provide country-specific assessment of existing or newly prepared NUP based on a consistent method (e.g. cross-country comparisons and
benchmarking, recommendations on improving the integration of sectoral policies and strengthening urban governance). The OECD’s National Urban Policy Reviews and the diagnostic review of the UN-Habitat could be adapted for this purpose. OECD and UN-Habitat have conducted the National Urban Policy Review of Vietnam in 2016-2017, to be published in 2018. Depending on the demand from countries and financing capacity, several reviews/diagnostics could be conducted every year.

- **Country-based technical assistance (UN-Habitat): Formulation, implementation and Monitoring & Evaluation**

Technical assistance can be provided on demand through UN-Habitat (Headquarters, Regional, and Country offices), Cities Alliance and other partner organizations. It can include support throughout the NUP process, including formulation, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation of the policy.

- **Multi-level policy dialogues on National Urban Policy (OECD, UN-Habitat)**

The NUPP, in collaboration with networks of sub-national governments such as UCLG, can create a space for policy dialogues to exchange views and ideas among national and subnational governments on NUP. Such dialogues could be combined with other country-specific supporting tools. Facilitating multi-level policy dialogues will help national and local policy-makers understand different perspectives on NUP and develop more effective NUP processes.

d) Monitoring the progress of NUP

As a NUP is a key implementation tool of the New Urban Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals, monitoring the progress of NUPs is essential. The NUPP provides global assessment of NUPs and supports countries’ monitoring and evaluation processes by reviewing their NUPs. In addition, the Programme will also develop internationally comparable statistics and indicators on cities.

- **State of NUP Report**

Under the NUPP, the current status of the NUP in each country is collected regularly and systematically, and the result will be published as a State of NUP Report. UN-Habitat and the OECD are currently preparing the UN Habitat and OECD have prepared the Global State of National Urban Policy Report, and aim to launch it at the World Urban Forum in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, February 2017.

- **Monitoring reviews by country**

The NUPP can also support countries to monitor the progress of NUP and provide specific recommendations, through the OECD’s National Urban Policy Reviews or similar studies and also through working with partners, such as UN Habitat’s City Prosperity Initiative.

e) Engaging stakeholders, networking and partnership building

The policy paper on NUP emphasizes the importance of collaborative efforts among all levels of government, civil society, the private sector and other relevant stakeholders. The NUPP thus aims to provide a platform for networking and engagement in the process of designing and implementing NUP. Ultimately, the NUPP will aim to strengthen partnerships between all stakeholders that are working on the development and implementation of NUP.

- **Advocacy of NUP via stakeholder networks and global processes**

The NUPP aims to systematically engage a wide range of stakeholders on urban issues in a given country (e.g. all levels of government, civil society, the private sector, multi-lateral donors, networks of cities, etc.) in the Programme so that the NUPP can be designed and implemented within their partnerships. It will also be important for the Programme, as a collective or individual action of the participating organizations, to promote the agenda of NUP in different global processes such as the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals and Paris Agreement and exchange views on how NUP can assist in achieving their objectives.

- **International Conference on NUP**

International Conference on NUP is a unique forum to exchange knowledge on NUP globally and facilitate high-level policy dialogues among stakeholders including policy makers of national and sub-national governments, NGOs, academia, civil society and the private sector on NUP. It is also a place to present the result of research activities conducted under the Programme. The Conference can also be used to benchmark and monitor the progress of NUP periodically among other countries. By bringing different stakeholders together to discuss NUP, the Conference is a venue for building new partnerships and strengthening existing ones.
The first Conference was organized by UN-Habitat, the Korea Research Institute for Human Settlements and The Korea Research Institute of Civil Engineering and Building Technologies, and supported by the Government of Korea (Incheon, Korea, 12-13 December 2015). The Second International Conference on National Urban Policy, entitled National Urban Policies: Implementing SDGs and the New Urban Agenda, was co-hosted by OECD and UN Habitat and supported by Cities Alliance. The Conference was held at the OECD headquarters in Paris, France, 15-18 May 2017.

4. Administration of the Programme

The NUPP is designed as a long-term initiative which supports the implementation of a global urban agenda for sustainable urbanization, including the New Urban Agenda, the Sustainable Development Goals and the Paris Agreement.

In terms of organization, the NUPP will take a flexible form so that all the institutions who are interested in benefitting from and/or contributing to the Programme can be a part. More specifically, it can consist of a wide range of contributors and users as members and several administrative functions including:

- The NUPP Founding Partners
- The Supporting Partners Group
- The Secretariat
- NUPP Network Partners

The NUPP Founding Partners constitute the decision-making body of the Programme, overseeing its management, annual work plan and budget, monitoring and communicating on global NUP progress, and undertaking joint activities to advance objectives of the Programme.

The Supporting Partners Group is comprised of representatives from the Founding Partners and supporting partners who support the Programme’s activities through financial or in-kind staff contributions. It is the advisory board for the Programme, advising on workplans, budgets, policies and operational strategies, and sharing relevant experiences and knowledge.

The Secretariat is responsible for day-to-day operations, promotion and communication activities and the maintenance of the platform.

The Partners Network is comprised of a broad base of stakeholders interested in NUP and who would like to engage in and support NUPP activities through ad hoc projects.

5. Launch of the Programme and Consultation/preparatory process

In the run-up to Habitat III in Quito, UN-Habitat, OECD and Cities Alliance undertook consultations on the draft proposal with their members as well as relevant stakeholders for comments and to collect their interest in joining the Programme. These consultations included discussion on the NUPP during the side event hosted by the OECD in the third Habitat III Preparatory Committee meeting in Surabaya, entitled, “Implementing the New Urban Agenda through Transformative National Urban Policies.”

The NUPP was formally launched at the Habitat III Conference in Quito, Ecuador. The Programme was launched by Executive Director of UN Habitat, Dr. Joan Clos, Secretary General of OECD, Ángel Gurría and Director of Cities Alliance, William Cobbett.
6. Contacts

Please contact us for comments / suggestions to the draft proposal:

**UN-Habitat**

Remy Sietchiping  
Leader, Regional and Metropolitan Planning Unit  
remy.sietchiping@unhabitat.org  
Tel: + 254-20-7623858

Jane Reid  
Regional and Metropolitan Planning Unit  
jane.reid@unhabitat.org  
Tel: + 254-20-7623715

**OECD**

Rudiger Ahrend  
Head of the OECD Urban Policy Programme  
rudiger.ahrend@oecd.org  
Tel: + 33 1 45 24 94 86

Tadashi Matsumoto  
Project Manager, Urban Green Growth / Knowledge Sharing  
tadashi.matsumoto@oecd.org  
Tel: +33 1 45 24 93 45

**Cities Alliance**

Marie-Alexandra Kurth  
Senior Urban Specialist  
mkurth@citiesalliance.org  
Tel: +32 2 880 42 26